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SUBJECT: AFGHAN MINISTRIES ORGANIZE FOR POST-CONFLICT DISTRICT
LEVEL ASSISTANCE

¶1. (U) Summary: The Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD) hosted a second meeting of the new Afghan/U.S./ISAF/UNAMA District Delivery Working Group (DDWG) on August 8 at the deputy minister level. The Forum, aimed at encouraging the creation of a mechanism for the quick deployment of coordinated, inter-ministerial assistance packages to districts recently cleared by Afghan and international security forces, made progress on formulating terms of reference, reinforced the notion that the initial focus should be on the east and south and tasked ministries with providing assessments by August 15 of their potential contributions to assistance packages. Afghan representatives stressed once again the central role that security will play in their ability to deploy resources and programs to the field. Two subsequent sub-working group meetings began the process of identifying criteria for selecting target districts and gave the Ministry of Finance an opportunity to present a possible mechanism through which inter-ministerial packages might be funded through an injection of U.S. funds directly into the Afghan government's core budget. This new consultation forum seems to have gotten off to a good start, but huge challenges remain to formulating and dispatching assistance to key districts - not least the scarcity of qualified personnel for ministries to send to the field. End Summary.

Second Working Group Meeting

¶2. (U) At the August 8 meeting, Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development's (MRRD) Deputy Minister for Programs Barmak chaired the session, with the Ministries of Finance, Education, Agriculture, Public Health and Interior, as well as the Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG), likewise represented at the deputy minister level. Deputy SRSG Peter Galbraith's assistant Chris Stevens sat in for UNAMA, and ISAF Deputy Chief of Staff for Stability RADM Borsboom was in attendance again this week for ISAF. The U.S. was represented by Interagency Provincial Affairs (IPA) Coordinator Liberi and USAID Mission Director Frej. For now, at least, suggestions to expand the membership of the working group were sidestepped.

¶3. (U) Discussion of the draft terms of reference for the working group brought to the fore the issue of whether the group should only focus on newly cleared districts in the South and East or also include targets elsewhere in the nation. On that, in the end, there appeared to be general agreement that the entire country should in principle be targeted but the initial phases should concentrate on districts in the South and East. Borsboom, the IDLG's Barna Karimi and Chris Stevens all brought up the UNAMA-sponsored "Integrated Approach" to identifying "tipping districts" for targeted interventions, with the question ultimately left unanswered about whether or not to synch the two approaches. A number of the Afghan representatives cautioned that, once launched, we must make our initiative succeed or risk further damaging the government's credibility.

¶4. (U) Several ministry representatives reiterated that security is absolutely key to any intervention, as they have packages that can be applied anywhere, provided the overall environment is secure. To them, designating which districts to target for ministerial packages is therefore primarily a function of the ANSF and international forces indicating the areas they expect to be able to hold long-term. On the packages, discussion pivoted between the need for each ministry to determine what it can do in key districts and the importance of those individual ministry plans being assembled into a coordinated Afghan government effort. IDLG's Barna Karimi correctly pointed out that packages will need to be tailored to the individual district. UNAMA pressed for the U.S. to specify how its assistance would be funded.

¶5. (U) Interagency Provincial Affairs (IPA) Coordinator Liberi gave a short brief on the civilian uplift as it applies to the South, together with an explanation of the Embassy's new IPA office and the role of the Senior Civilian Representative. USAID Mission Director Frej offered a preview of some of the kinds of programs (and their magnitude) that USAID hopes to deploy. The Embassy team reinforced the message that, while the U.S. will remain committed to Afghanistan's development for years, our immediate focus is on making a difference over the next 12-18 months as part of COIN.

¶6. (U) Another meeting will be held August 15 at the Deputy Minister level, with the chair rotating next to the IDLG (The Ministry of Finance will host the following session). At the next session, MRRD will seek final endorsement of fine-tuned terms of reference (para. 10). An initial cut at identifying critical districts will also be presented along with thoughts on a funding approach. Finally, individual ministries were tasked to prepare a notional plan of what they might be able to deploy to targeted

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districts, to include the corresponding costing, logistical and staffing requirements.

Sub-Working Group Meetings on Identifying Districts and a Funding Mechanism

¶7. (U) On August 7 the IDLG hosted a sub-working group meeting on defining which districts to target for intervention. The discussion was a bit circular, as the Afghan ministry representatives indicated they would direct programs to areas the ANSF and international forces declared secured; while the ISAF representative noted Gen McChrystal's concern to factor GIROA priorities into his revision of the ISAF operational plan. Some general criteria were nonetheless identified, and the Embassy took these back and is now developing a short-list of districts in the South and East to present for further review at the August 15 meeting of the working group. During an August 13 meeting with IDLG Director Popal and Deputy Director Karimi, Emboffs reiterated that, in order to select priority districts, it is essential to know where GIROA has the capacity to deliver services and personnel.

¶8. (U) The Ministry of Finance called together a separate sub-working group meeting this week where, as expected, Deputy Minister Mastoor presented a fairly cogent proposal for the U.S. to channel its funds for integrated ministerial assistance packages directly through GIROA's core budget. His plan calls for establishing a separate code for this funding in the budget, with allocations under this code going to participating ministries. He expressed confidence that it would be possible to disburse funds on a fast-track basis and that delays caused by cumbersome procurement procedures could be avoided. He suggested that actual disbursements should be made via MOF offices in the provinces, which would likely be reinforced with additional MOF personnel to help ensure proper accounting and oversight. Mastoor called for establishing a steering committee in Kabul to approve the district packages, though the involvement of line ministry representatives at the provincial and district levels would also be key to the success of the program. Terms of reference for the steering committee as well as an agreement of some sort between GIROA and the U.S., perhaps in the form of an MOU, would be required. In principle, the procedures would need to be in place by October in order to be folded into the

next Afghan budget cycle, though the Deputy Minister suggested a bridge funding mechanism could be used if it proved difficult to meet the October deadline.

Comment

¶9. (SBU) After two working group and two sub-working group meetings, we seem to be off to a good start with this new forum. It certainly appears to have succeeded in focusing the minds of key ministries on the issue of quick, post-kinetic interventions. Next steps will be agreeing on a small number of districts for initial focus, as a prelude to a larger rollout in the foreseeable future.

¶10. (SBU) As far as funding is concerned, the Ministry of Finance made a good case for its proposal, but the World Bank has also approached USAID about a possible fast-track Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF) mechanism. Funding through a capable Ministry of Finance mechanism meets our goals of channeling a greater share of assistance directly through GIROA and ensuring GIROA remains at the forefront of the District Development Fund initiative, but the World Bank ARTF option, if sufficiently agile, offers the proven benefits of World Bank oversight and enhanced accountability. Depending on further discussions with the Ministry of Finance and the World Bank, we may need to consider the ARTF approach or even a hybrid if the MOF approach alone proves unfeasible and these other approaches can address the critical need for quick responses to implement this initiative.

¶11. (SBU) It is impossible to overlook the challenges ahead, not least of which is the lack of GIROA personnel to put in the field (the Ministry of Finance even suggested most early implementation might have to be via NGOs or the private sector - not our preferred solution if that means GIROA officials remain invisible in targeted districts). Another issue we will be addressing shortly is the inclusion of key allies in this process, particularly the British and Canadians.

¶12. (U) Begin text of draft terms of reference

District Delivery Working Group (DDWG)
Terms of Reference

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¶1. Background

The establishment of this Working Group was agreed in a meeting between the Ministers of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD), Agriculture Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL), Finance (MoF), and Public Health (MoPH), Deputy Ministers of Education, the Director of the Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG) and the US Ambassador and USAID Mission Director on the 1st August 2009.

¶2. Objectives to Achieve

The Government of Afghanistan (GoA) has 4 primary objectives to be achieved through the District Delivery Working Group:

- 1) The establishment of a cross-ministerial Government presence in rural districts that have been recently secured as a result of military operations.
- 2) The delivery of services to the rural people through an integrated package of activities which include both governance and development.
- 3) Sufficient capacity and capabilities for the Government's district staff to deliver these services.
- 4) Afghan leadership guiding this process, supported by the international community.

The goal is for the Government to be visible on the ground in post-kinetic districts, delivering services in response to the priority needs of the local communities.

These activities will create a foundation for stabilization and

prepare the ground for the (re-) introduction of national programs. This can be used as a model and applied across Afghanistan to capitalize on the opportunities in recently cleared areas to successfully hold and build.

Implementation will take place through a phased approach, with an immediate focus on the post-kinetic, newly secured areas in the South and East, with the longer-term aim to utilize this model in other post-conflict districts nationwide.

13. Main Tasks

a) Delivery

- Devise a multi-sectoral and costed package of immediate interventions, encompassing a flexible and effective funding mechanism which maintains acceptable standards of transparency and accountability

- Develop an implementation approach and mechanism, including levels of decision making authority - taking into consideration existing mechanisms

a) State Governance

- Devise a strategy to strengthen GoA leadership at the district level and promote positive Government visibility through delivery and the establishment of productive partnerships with rural communities

- Visible commitment by the Ministries' senior management through regular visits to the areas of implementation

- Agreement and positioning of Government staff at the regional level for liaison with Regional Commands

- Identification and mobilization of staffing requirements for Government departments at the district level to deliver the package of activities, including capacity support to develop and strengthen the necessary capabilities

b) Partnership

- Definition of relationship, roles and responsibilities between the Ministries as individual Ministries and as a 'whole of Government' team

- Definition of relationship, roles and responsibilities of the 3Ms together: Ministries, Military, Missions (Embassies, donors, UN etc)

- Full consultation between partners for the design of the standard package, with sequenced participation during implementation according to the level of stability

- Agreement on and support to a single governance structure for development activities at the district level

c) Planning

- Identification of priority districts, through agreed criteria, for presence and development activities

- Needs identification plan (with mechanism) - including community identification of priorities and Ministry needs assessment for individual ministry activities, through a mobile and responsive scoping team with a defined Terms of Reference

- Formulation of generic basic service provision packaged, tailored according to the results of district-specific needs assessment

- Implementation plan for the immediate term - to include targets

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and timeframes - including the deployment of staff to the districts and the delivery of development activities

- Identification of logistical requirements and successful allocation/receipt of dedicated transport

- Capacity development support plan based on available resources and technical assistance, and the sequencing of inputs, which will be adjusted to reflect the changing level of stability

d) Communications

- The DDWG is responsible for all communications with regard to the presence of Government staff and the delivery of services by the Government Ministries at the district level

- Communications will be delivered through the spokesperson of the relevant Provincial Governor

14. Preliminary Membership

- Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD)
- Ministry of Agriculture Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL)
- Ministry of Finance (MoF)
- Ministry of Public Health (MoPH)
- Ministry of Education (MoE)
- Ministry of Interior (MoI)
- Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG)
- U.S.
- UNAMA
- ISAF

It is recommended for the Ministry participants to be a Deputy Minister and 1 key advisor, and for senior representatives from the international community.

The expansion of the membership to include other Ministries and donors will be flexible with additional parties included on an as needed basis.

15. Organization

Due to the need for immediate Government presence and rapid implementation, weekly meetings will take place, at the appropriate level, on Saturdays at 10 a.m.

The venue for the meetings will be rotated between the Ministries, with the host Ministry chairing the meeting and responsible for the secretariat support. Minutes will be circulated by the close of business the day after the meeting.

The agenda for following meetings will be agreed at the close of each meeting.

If the regular members are unable to attend, they must take the responsibility to fully brief the participants before the meeting and share previous minutes, to prevent duplicate discussions on issues that have already been decided in previous meetings.

Sub-committees will be organized to make progress with the tasks identified by the DDWG.

16. Timeframe

The DDWG has specific tasks to complete in a short timeframe (1-3 months). However, implementation of activities is initially programmed for one year. This allows for the implementation of immediate activities to stabilize and hold newly secured areas, together with the transition in the semi-stable environment to the resumption of the national development programs.

It remains to be discussed whether, once these tasks have been accomplished, the DDWG will assume the responsibilities of a project Steering Committee to oversee project implementation.

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